

Northern Command Announces Full Operational Capability

Press Release

Northern Command Announces Full Operational Capability

Posted Sep 16, 2003 at 8:25:AM MDT

PETERSON Air Force Base, Colo. — U.S. Northern Command, created in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, announced full operational capability on the second anniversary of the New York, Pentagon and Shanksville, Penn., tragedies.

USNORTHCOM, the nation's newest unified combatant command responsible for providing homeland defense and military assistance to civil authorities made the announcement Sept. 11 following an in-depth evaluation of the command's capabilities as they relate to its missions, tasks and responsibilities.

"Our homeland defense and civil support competence has been refined through real world experiences as well as through rigorous validation exercise scenarios," said Air Force Gen. Ralph E. "Ed" Eberhart, USNORTHCOM commander. "From that in-depth evaluation and assessment of its capabilities, USNORTHCOM has demonstrated its full operational capability."



U.S. Northern Command emblem

Eberhart noted USNORTHCOM played a vital role in Operation Noble Eagle, support for Hurricane Lili and the response task force to the Space Shuttle Columbia accident, wildland firefighting and presidential support missions. In addition, the command participated in numerous exercises beginning with Unified Defense in September 2002 to prove USNORTHCOM had initial operational capability and most recently Determined Promise 03, or DP 03, in August that confirmed the command has evolved to full operation capability.

"This last evaluation was thorough, it was complete, and it was very objective and challenging ... and we passed with flying colors," said Air Force Maj. Gen. Maurice L. "Lee" McFann Jr., USNORTHCOM director of operations.

DP 03 was a multi-level exercise conducted Aug. 18–26 that focused primarily on a simulated plague in Nevada. It also involved USNORTHCOM's simultaneous response to a hurricane, fires, train derailment and other scenarios to include the actual deployment of more than 1,400 people to various locations. The scenario focused on 235 objectives tied to the command's 20 mission essential tasks.

"We identified all the tasks and supporting tasks that (the USNORTHCOM) staff must be able to accomplish and tied a specific event in the exercise to those training objectives," noted Marine Col. Gene Pino, director of training and exercises.

As a combatant command, USNORTHCOM deters, prevents and defeats threats and aggression aimed at the United States and its interests within its assigned area of responsibility – generally the North American continent and maritime approaches out to approximately 500 nautical miles from the coastline. As the command in charge of providing military assistance to civil authorities in the United States, USNORTHCOM provides "one-stop shopping" for federal agencies when directed by the President or Secretary of Defense to lead efforts to mitigate disasters and their after-effects.

Pino noted that most people don't realize exactly what USNORTHCOM was able to do in such a short period of time.

"This is the first time in a long, long time that a brand new combatant command has stood up from nothing," Pino noted. "Most of the combatant commands currently in existence were transitioned from already existing commands, but USNORTHCOM on the other hand, was a true evolution of a brand new command."

Noting the other commands were given in excess of two years to have full operational capability, Pino said NORTHCOM was put on a fast track for obvious reasons.

Northern Command Announces Full Operational Capability

"I don't think there is a more important mission than defending this nation," he said. "So, we have evolved rather quickly ... we've made a lot of changes ... and validated those changes as a result of DP 03."

Although USNORTHCOM has announced full operational capability, the training for its personnel is far from over. The command has already planned a minimum of two major exercises each year through 2008 to hone its skills and continue to build interagency relationships throughout the nation.

"This is not an end state. This is, in fact, part of a journey," Eberhart said. "We'll never truly reach full operational capability. We are always going to be striving to be better."